

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-15

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R 291525Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2882
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PDIP, PINT, BL
SUBJECT: BANZER APPOINTED AMBASSADOR TO ARGENTINA

1. SUMMARY: ON SEPTEMBER 27, FORMER PRESIDENT BANZER MET WITH
PRESIDENT PEEDA AND TO MILITARY COMMANDERS TO REVIEW SOUTHERN
CONE TENSIONS AND THRI IMPLICATIONS FOR BOLIVIA. AT THE
CLOSE OF THE MEETNING, AFTER EXPATIATING ON THE GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATIO
N

,
BANZER ACCEPTED AN INVITATION BY THE ARMED FORCES TO BCCOME
BOLIVIA'S AMBASSADOR TO ARGENTINA. MEANWHILE, ON THE HOMEFRONT,
THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE CONTINED TO IMPROVE WHEN MNR-PRA
ALLIANCE LEADERS PAZ ESTENSSORO AND GUEVARA ARZE PAID A WELL-PUB
LICIZED CALL ON PEREDA AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PLANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PRESS, THE MILITARY MEETING
WAS CONVENED TO ADDRESS PERSISTANT REPORTS (PRESUMABLY IN THE MEDIA)
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ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A SOUTHERN CONE CONFLICT WHICH COULD
AFFECT BOLIVIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY. IN ATTENDANCE WERE FORMER
PRESIDENT HUGO BANZER, PRESIDENT JUAN PEREDA, DEFENSE MINISTER
WALTER CASTRO, INTERIOR MINISTER FAUSTINO RICO TORO, ARMED
FORCES COMMANDER ANGEL SALMON, SERVICE CHIEFS DAVID PADILLA
(ARMY), JOSE ANTONIO SEMPETEGUI (AIR FORCE), AND MOISES VASQUEZ
SEMPETEGUI (NAVY), AND ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF ANTONIO

ROJAS. DURING THE MEETING, WHICH LASTED FOR THREE HOURS AND FORTY MINUTES, BANZER REPORTEDLY EXPOUNDED ON THE REGION'S GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION AND BRIEFED THE GROUP ON HIS RECENT PRIVATE TALKS WITH ARGENTINA'S PRESIDENT VIDELA. ALTHOUGH THE ALLEGED PURPOSE OF THE MEETING HAS RECEIVED WIDE PUBLICITY, ITS AGENDA AND CONCLUSIONS HAVE NOT BEEN DISCLOSED.

3. AT THE CLOSE OF THE MEETING, THE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND REPORTEDLY ASKED BANZER TO BE BOLIVIA'S AMBASSADOR TO ARGENTINA, AND HE ACCEPTED. ACTUALLY, THE POSSIBILITY OF BANZER'S BECOMING BOLIVIA'S ENVOY IN BUENOS AIRES HAD BEEN UNDER DISCUSSION FOR AT LEAST A MONTH. WE UNDERSTAND THAT BANZER HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN THE POST, BUT, STILL EMBITTERED BY HIS OVERTHROW ON JULY 21, DID NOT WANT TO ACCEPT IT FROM PEREDA. CONSEQUENTLY, AN ARRANGEMENT WAS MADE WHEREBY THE ARMED FORCES INSTITUTION, AS REPRESENTED BY THE HIGH COMMAND, WOULD MAKE THE OVERTURE, AND BANZER, AS A SOLDIER AND PATRIOT, WOULD BE ABLE TO CLAIM HE WAS DUTY-BOUND TO OBLIGE.

4. ACCORDING TO ONE OF HIS CLOSEST ADVISERS, BANZER'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE BUENOS AIRES POST STEMS IN PART FROM HIS FIRM DECISION NOT TO BE A CANDIDATE IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS. THE ADVISER REMARKED, HOWEVER, THAT BANZER WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO BUILD A POLITICAL MOVEMENT TO SERVE AS A N ELECTORAL VEHICLE IN THE FUTURE. BANZER'S IMMEDIATE INTEREST, THE ADVISER CONTINUED, IS TO PROMOTE THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF VICTOR PAZ
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ESTENSSORO, WHOM BANZER CURRENTLY REGARDS AS THE MOST SUITABLE STANDARD-BEARER FOR "NATIONALISM" AND THE ONLY PERSON CAPABLE OF OUTPOINTING HERNAN SILES IN FAIR ELECTIONS. TO THIS END, BANZER' FOLLOWERS ARE WORKING QUIETLY TOWARD SOME SORT OF AFFILIATION WITH THE MNR-PRA ALLIANCE AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (PDC). WHILE BANZER IS IN BUENOS AIRES, THE ADVISER SAID, HIS IMAGE AND INTERESTS WILL BE PROTECTED THROUGH A POLITICAL OFFICE RUN BY FORMER FINANCE MINISTER DAVID BLANCO.

5. THE MILITARY COMMANDER'S MEETING AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF BANZER'S AMBASSADORIAL APPOINTMENT TOOK PLACE AGAINST A BACKDROP OF EXTRAORDINARY POLITICAL TRANQUILITY. VIRTUALLY ALL THE MAJOR OPPOSITION GROUPS SEEM CONTENT WITH THE TENOR AND THE RATHER UNHURRIED PACE OF THEIR PRELIMINARY TALKS WITH THE PEREDA GOVERNMENT, AND APPEAR CONFIDENT THAT A FRAMEWORK FOR THE DIALOGUE DEMOCRATIZATION WILL EMERGE SHORTLY. AFTER THE COMMANDERS' MEETING, THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE FURTHER IMPROVED, WHEN PAZ ESTENSSORO AND WALTER GUEVARA ARZE, HIS RUNNING MATE IN THE JULY 9 ELECTIONS, PAID A WELL-PUBLICIZED CALL ON PEREDA AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. DURING THEIR VISIT WITH THE PRESIDENT, THE MNR-PRA ALLIANCE LEADERS DELIVERED A DOCUMENT THAT REITERATES, AMONG OTHER POINTS, THE MAJOR

OPPOSITION GROUPS' CALL FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN THE FIRST HALF OF 1979. AFTERWARD, IN COMMENTS TO THE PRESS, BOTH PAZ AND GUEVARA EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT PEREDA WOULD COMPLY WITH HIS PLEDGE TO CONTINUE THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS. MORE HELPFUL YET, PAZ ADDED THAT THE PEREDA REGIME REPRESENTED "AN ADVANCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC SENSE" OVER BANZER'S.

6. COMMENT: WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE THE REAL MOTIVATION FOR THE BLUE-RIBBON COMMANDER'S MEETING. OUR PRELIMINARY VIEW, HOWEVER, IS THAT IT REPRESENTS AN ATTEMPT ON THE PART OF PEREDA AND THE ARMED FORCES TO CONVINCE AN OFTEN CYNICAL PUBLIC THAT BOLIVA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS ARE BEING TENDED TO. NOT LESS IMPORTANT, IT ALSO SET THE STAGE FOR BANZER TO ACCEPT AN OFFER HE NEVER WANTED TO REFUSE.
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BOEKER

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Message Attributes

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Draft Date: 29 sep 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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